

The Way of the Cross

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[0 : 00] Well, let me welcome us all to this Lunchtime Bible Talk. It's good to see you. This is your first time, a particular welcome, and there is still lunch, if you haven't had it already.

I don't know if you're allowed to have two lunches or not, but no doubt there'll be sharp eyes watching to check. Anyway, we're continuing our short series of studies on the Psalms. Coming today to Psalm 22, which you'll find on page 457. We'll begin by reading the psalm. Psalm 22, page 457.

To the choir master, according to the Doe of the Dawn, that's presumably a kind of musical notation, a psalm of David. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night that I find no rest.

[1 : 12] Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted. They trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were rescued.

In you they trusted, and were not put to shame. But I am a worm, and not a man. Scorned by mankind, and despised by the people.

All who see me mock me. They make mouths of me. They wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, for he delights in him.

Yet you are he who took me from the womb. You made me trust at my mother's breasts. On you was I cast from my birth. And from my mother's womb you have been my God.

Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. Many bulls encompass me. Strong bulls of Bashan surround me.

[2 : 10] They open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart is like wax. It is melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a potsherd. And my tongue sticks to my jaws. You'll lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs encompass me. A company of evildoers encircles me. They have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones.

They stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them. And for my clothing they cast lots. But you, O Lord, do not be far off.

O you, my help, come quickly to my aid. Deliver my soul from the sword. My precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the mouth of the lion.

[3 : 08] You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen. I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him. And stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel. For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted.

He has not hidden his face from him, but has heard when he cried to him. From you comes my praise and the great congregation. My vows I will perform before those who fear him.

The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied. Those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord.

And all the families of the nations shall worship before you. The kingship belongs to the Lord. And he rules over the nations. All the prospers of the earth eat and worship before him.

[4 : 13] Shall bow all who go down to the dust. Even the one who could not keep himself alive. Posterity shall serve him. It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation.

They shall come and proclaim his righteousness. So a people yet unborn that he has done it. Amen. That is the word of the Lord.

Now let's have a moment of prayer. Lord God, we thank you for your word. That word which speaks into so many circumstances.

That word which refuses to allow us to escape into a world of sentimentality. That word which tells us reality as it is.

That word which does not flinch from telling us of darkness and despair and death. That word which penetrates right into our hearts.

[5 : 14] Yet that word which, having shown us the darkness and the despair, points beyond to the light. And brings us the message of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So help us in these moments as we look together at your words. That we will, that our hearts will be moved. That our minds will be stretched.

And that we will leave here knowing that we have heard from you. And that you have spoken to us. And help and are changing us into the image of Jesus Christ.

In whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. On an autumn day, the 16th of October, 1555, two men, bishops Ridley and Letimer, stood side by side in the middle of Oxford, tied to a stake.

They had fallen foul of Mary Tudor, who was persecuting them and others for their faithful proclamation of the gospel. And as the flames were lit, Letimer said these words to Ridley, Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man.

[6 : 34] And we shall this day light such a candle in England, that by God's grace shall never be put out. One of the many, many stories, inspirational stories of martyrs who were faithful to death.

Yet I must confess, every time I think of that story, my heart begins to shrink. Could I have, would I be able to have the courage of Ridley and Latimer faced with these circumstances?

That's quite an important question to ask ourselves. Let's not, let's not begin to, let's not begin to ask the question in the wrong way.

The Lord isn't going to ask us on the last day, How did you cope with the persecution I didn't send you? The Lord is going to ask each one of us, How did you cope with the circumstances I did send, good and bad?

And these stories of Ridley and Latimer and many others are stories which I say inspire and also humble, The people who have given everything for their faith.

[7 : 46] Isn't it strange that when we come to the supreme story of all, The story of the Son of God giving his life, He's not saying play up and play the game, And he's saying, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And I think that's a very, very important thing to reflect on for a moment. At the moment of darkness, The Son of God became, Not like the heroes of his army, Not like the Riddleys and the Latimers, But like the weakest of his followers.

Entered into the experience of those, Who feel, well I'm not the kind of stuff that martyrs are made of. Entered into the darkness, And entered into the darkness alone.

That seems to me the astonishing thing about the story of Gethsemane, The story of Calvary, And particularly these words which he, our Lord, Spoke on the cross, My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?

It's always, He wasn't so much quoting these words, As making his own, These words written long centuries before, And realizing they were only properly fulfilled in him.

[9 : 06] Now these Psalms we're looking at, 20 to 24, Are Psalms of David, Psalms of the King, And we're not given the circumstances here. Some of the earlier Psalms, Psalms 3 to 6, We are told, Come in that dreadful period of David's life, When his son Absalom rebelled against him.

And some of the other Psalms talk about his persecution by Saul. And it very well be, That in David's own experience, This Psalm belongs in one of those periods, Perhaps the period of the persecution by Saul.

Because one of the things that marked that was, It was very long, And very protracted. Whereas the Absalom rebellion, However awful it was, Lasted only for a short time.

And you can understand, Why David might have spoken these words. After all, The prophet Samuel had anointed him, As king over Israel. The result of that, Was simply persecution, By the then reigning king Saul.

And he might well have felt, That God had let him down. That God had forsaken him. And so it may well be, That this Psalm, Which goes much further than David, Comes from that period, In David's

life.

[10:18] Now, The Psalm falls into two main sections, 1 to 21, And 22 to 31. And I've taken the headings for that, From one Peter, One Peter, Peter reflecting on the cross, In his first letter, Almost sums up this Psalm, The sufferings of Christ, He says, And the glories which followed.

I'm going to use these as headings, Verses 1 to 21, The sufferings of Christ, And verses 22 to 31, The glory which followed. So let's look at the sufferings of Christ, Verses 1 to 21.

It is a deep and dark experience, The darkest experience, That anyone on this earth, Has ever passed through. And there are a number of elements, And the worst thing is, The silence of God. I cry, You don't answer, I find no rest. Before any description of the situation, The worst thing of all, I'm here alone.

I need you beside me, God. You're out there. I'm in the middle of this bunch, This ravaging wolves, And lions, And bears, Who hate me, Who taunt me, Who want to kill me.

[11:36] I need you, I need you here beside me, Not somewhere out there. That's the experience here. And in the book of Job, You have a much more detailed description of that experience, The absence, The silence of God.

There's a great mystery here, We don't understand it. I don't think we'll even understand it in eternity. No angel in the sky can fully bear that sight, But downward bends his burning eye at mysteries so bright.

There is mystery here. Catches up the whole process of bearing sin for us. On the one hand, The undisturbed unity of the blessed Trinity, Of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On the other side, This, what later writers call, The dark night of the soul. The old gospel hymn says this, None of the ransomed ever knew, How deep were the waters crossed, Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through, Where he found the sheep that was lost.

This is the darkness, Terrible, unrelieved darkness. But you'll notice, Even in the darkness, It is still my God, The God whom I feel I belong to, And who belongs to me.

[12:59] A God who is true to his word. Verse 3, You are holy, Enthroned on the praises of Israel. Now, what does this mean?

It means not, It's not a literal phrase, It means that even in the blackest moments, Like in this psalm, Israel sings the praises of God. And by singing the praises of God, They're enthroning him. Because they're basically saying, This is not the final statement. This is not the ultimate reality. See, if we say the words, Jesus is Lord, And look around at the world, Look into our own hearts, This does not seem true.

So that's a statement of faith, A statement of loyalty. Israel sang about his holiness, His salvation, His answering of prayer, Verses 4 and 5, And you, our fathers, trusted.

They trusted, And you delivered them. To you they cried, Were rescued. And you they trusted, Were not put to shame. That is the fact. But, The reality for the psalmist Seems very different.

[14:08] In verses 6 and 7 and 8, Excuse me. These words seem to mock him. He trusts in the Lord.

Let him deliver him. In the words of the cross, If you are the son of God, Come down from the cross. And then we'll believe you. You see, in these moments, We need to know, We need to hold on to the facts, Even if we don't feel like it.

And again, he lays hold on God. Verse 9, God is the author of life. You took me from the womb. You made me trust At my mother's breast.

On you I was cast from my birth. From the mother's womb. You have been my God. Surely you're not going to abandon me now. You saw me as an unborn fetus in the womb.

You saw me as I came out of the womb. And as I've grown up, You still see me. But it is still dreadful, isn't it? Verse 12, Many of his enemies appear in bestial terms.

[15:13] Strong bulls of Bashan. The powerful cattle. The rich pasture lands of Bashan. Lions and dogs. Dog here is not your cuddly pet.

But the scavengers that infested eastern cities. And were particularly savage. And lions, of course. David, of course. In his early life, Had tackled lions. My strength is dried up. The physical suffering here. And you notice these words.

My tongue sticks to my jaws. Fulfilled. As Jesus says, I thirst. The physical agony. The mental agony. The emotional agony.

The spiritual agony. As much as dark as it can be. But there's still an appeal to God to save. Verse 19, You, O Lord, Don't be far off.

[16:08] I'm in this circle, Surrounded by these ravaging beasts. Come inside the circle beside me. Don't stand away out there. However, This is a vivid description of uncontrolled crowd behavior.

You know how crowd behavior can turn nasty. Individuals who are perfectly decent and perfectly law-abiding, To get into a crowd, Can sometimes behave in a most savage and a most unrestrained way.

That's what he's talking about here. Deliver me, He says. Rescue me, My precious life from the power of the dogs. So, Peter, This is a, This is what Peter would have called the sufferings of Christ.

David looking well beyond his time. Now, No doubt, As I say, David experienced something of this, But not its fullness. But then we, There's a change of theme in chapter, In verse 22, The glories which followed.

Now, This drama of victory, Of defeat, And then victory, Happens so often in David's life. And it's to be replayed on a greater scale, In Christ's death and resurrection.

[17:25] And Hebrews 2, Verses 11 and 12, Specifically relates this to Christ's death. I will tell of your name to my brothers, In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you.

And you'll notice, The psalmist is no longer isolated. I will tell of your name to my brothers, In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you. And by verse 25, That has become the great congregation.

You see, The thing about suffering, Depression, Darkness, Is it so often isolates people, Doesn't it? People feel utterly alone, Even if there are people around them, Even if there are people trying to help, They still feel utterly alone.

But here now, There's the sense that he's no longer isolated. The vast company of the redeemed, Sitting around the Lord's table. Verse 26, The afflicted shall eat, And be satisfied.

That's going to be picked up, Of course, In Psalm 23, You prepare a table before me, In the presence of my enemies. By the way, It's interesting to see the psalm as a book.

[18:34] It's not just, It's not just a random collection, Flung together, Like Mission Praise, Or something like that. It's a well-constructed book, And very often, You find anticipations, And reminiscences, In different psalms.

There's two things to notice, About this congregation. First of all, There are no national, Or class boundaries. Verse 27, All the ends of the earth, Shall remember, And turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations, Shall worship before you.

You see, This lonely suffering, Was going to lead, To this great congregation. That is the point. As Jesus, Our Lord, Went into the darkness, And desolation, This was going to bring, Many, Many, Many people, To glory.

And indeed, The final words, Of the risen Lord, In Acts chapter 1, You will be my witnesses, In Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, And to the ends of the earth. Same, Kind of the same phrase here, The ends of the earth.

No boundaries, National, Or geographical. Rich and poor, Glorious diversity, And yet unity. Now, To some extent, This happened in David's life.

[19:56] In the later years of David's life, David conquered the whole territory, Between the Nile and the Euphrates, Fulfilling the promise to Abraham, That his descendants would live, In the land that stretched, Between these rivers.

And in Solomon's time, As people like the Queen of Sheba, Came to listen to him, And learn from him. You find that the whole earth, In a sense, Is coming to David, And to Solomon.

But, This will only be finally fulfilled, When he returns, And all the lands worship. There is worship, In all the lands, At the moment.

It would probably be difficult, To find a spot on earth, Where somebody, Or however small a group it may be, Is worshipping the Lord. And we know, In our own city, And we're so glad, To have so many people, From all over the world, Who come and join with us, And this happens, In other cities, And other churches, Here in this city.

And it's a, Pointing to the time, When not just people, In every land will worship, But all the lands, Will worship. That's the first thing. All, And you'll notice as well, Just before we leave that, Verse 29, All the prosperous of the earth, Eat and worship, And then those who go down to the dust.

[21 : 12] The people, In all set of society, In all circumstances. But the, Other thing, It's always looking to the future. Verse 21, Sorry, Verse 30, Posterity shall serve him, It shall be told of the Lord, To the coming generation, They shall come and proclaim his righteousness, Of people yet unborn, That he has done it.

Now, As David, No doubt, Penned those words, Probably after a particular crisis, When he had been rescued, And as his imagination, Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, His imagination begins to roam far and wide, Lands that David had never heard of, Languages that had probably not even been invented, When he lived.

All these, Are going to become part of it. See, It's not just, If you glance back at verses 4 and 5, In you are fathers trusted, You trusted, They trusted, You delivered them, To you they cried, Were rescued, And they trusted, And were not put to shame.

That's past blessing. But you know, Past blessing, However grateful we may be, Cannot really sustain us. We said, We need to look to the future.

This is not past blessing, This is blessing for all the generations to come. That he has done it. Ultimately, That he has finished the work.

[22 : 42] Remember the words on the cross, It is finished. You see, Nothing can stop that blessing. As David looks into the future, Not seeing clearly, But nonetheless, Seeing how wonderful it's all going to be.

As David looks to the time, When God will be God, And the world will know it. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord God, We do not understand the mystery, Of the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These are depths, Which you have no line to plumb. And we do not fully understand, The coming glory. And yet, Lord, Like the ancient Samist, We still look to that time, To generations yet unborn.

We look back with thankfulness, To those who, Went before us in the faith, To the great cloud of witnesses. We also look forward, To those who have yet to be born, And yet to be born again.

And thank you, That you will fulfill all your purposes, For the glory of Christ's name. Amen.